
Dog Bites Result in More Children Requiring Surgery in WA

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An increasing number of children are presenting at a Perth Hospital for surgery following dog bites, according to a recent study.

Dr Bernard Luczak, a plastic and reconstructive surgical registrar at Princess Margaret Hospital, will today present the findings of his research to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) Annual Scientific Congress in Adelaide.

The retrospective study, which analysed six months worth of admissions to theatre, aimed to identify the causes of facial soft tissue injuries (FSTI) in children aged six months to fourteen years of age, the location of the injury, and any trend that developed.

Dr Luczak said that the higher proportion of dog bite injuries amongst children had come as a surprise, and were particularly evident in toddlers and in the cheek region.

“The rate of dog bites was significantly higher than what you would expect to see in the adult population, which is unsurprising.

“However, they were also noticeably higher amongst our cohort compared to other similar studies of children.

“While it is impossible to identify an upward trend among the general population from our figures alone, it is a timely reminder of what can happen when there are interactions between young children and pets.

“This isn’t to say that people shouldn’t own a pet, or that having a child and owning a pet simultaneously will necessarily result in this sort of outcome.

“However, there will always be some level of inherent risk when children and animals coexist. It is important that people do not become complacent, and that they take steps to minimise these risks wherever possible.

“Dog bites in particular can be very serious; therefore I would encourage people to remain vigilant in monitoring the interactions between their pets and their children.

“As much as possible training should be provided to both children and pets on how to behave around each other and re-enforced regularly.”

The study also found that boys were more commonly injured than girls, most notable with increasing age, and that that falls and object collisions were more likely in younger children, with bike and sports injuries more likely in older children.

“The results of the study are useful as they allow us to predict distinct patterns of injury in different groups of children with regard to their resultant injuries,” Dr Luczak said.

“Specific steps to minimise the risks of these injuries can subsequently be taken in each group; most notably with the dog bite injury example.”